

Message Text

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NATO UNCLASSIFIED FROM WASHINGTON
NADA/ASSESSMENT/JUN 003/MFA WASHINGTON/
SUBJECT: PRESS FREEDOM IN LATIN AMERICA: AN IMPROVING
PICTURE

THE LIBERALIZATION AND "RETURN TO DEMOCRACY" MOVEMENTS
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IN THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE HAVE IMPROVED THE CLIMATE FOR
PRESS FREEDOM IN SEVERAL COUNTRIES -- INCLUDING SOME
WHOSE HUMAN RIGHTS PERFORMANCES HAVE BEEN CRITICIZED.

-- BRAZIL: THE GEISEL REGIME LAST WEEK EFFECTIVELY
ENDED CENSORSHIP OF DOMESTIC WRITTEN MEDIA BY LIFTING
CONTROLS ON THE THREE JOURNALS -- A SOCIALIST MAGAZINE,

A TRADE PAPER FOR JOURNALISTS, AND THE CATHOLIC NEWSPAPER OF SAO PAULO -- UNAFFECTED BY A PRIOR EASING OF CENSORSHIP UNDER GEISEL (RADIO AND TV REMAIN UNDER CENSORSHIP.)

-- ARGENTINA: A FEW DAYS BEFORE GEISEL'S MOVE, THE VIDELA GOVERNMENT ABOLISHED TWO DECREES WHICH HAD PROHIBITED LOCAL NEWS MEDIA FROM PRINTING MATERIAL ORIGINATING FROM ABROAD ON ARGENTINA.

-- CHILE: IN THE PAST SIX MONTHS THE PINOCHET GOVERNMENT HAS VIRTUALLY ELIMINATED FORMAL PRESS RESTRICTIONS, EXCEPT THAT DIRECT ATTACKS ON PINOCHET OR THE MILITARY AS AN INSTITUTION ARE NOT PERMITTED. HOWEVER, SOME CRITICISM OF GOVERNMENT ACTIONS AND POLICIES (E.G., OVER THE LETELIER CASE) IS NOW TOLERATED.

-- HAITI: WHILE MOST OF THE HAITIAN PRESS CONTINUES TO BE RESTRAINED IN ITS CRITICISM OF GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS AND OFFICIALS, GRADUAL LIBERALIZATION CONTINUES. AS THE INTER-AMERICAN PRESS ASSOCIATION NOTED IN ITS FEBRUARY, 1978 REPORT "... IT SEEMS EVIDENT THAT THERE HAS BEEN A NET GAIN FOR THE HAITIAN PRESS IN THE PAST YEAR. NO ONE DENIES THAT THE PRESS TODAY IS SAYING MORE THAN IT DID A YEAR AGO AND A GREAT DEAL MORE THAN IT DID SEVEN YEARS AGO."

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-- NICARAGUA: SOMOZA'S LIFTING OF THE STATE OF SEIGE LAST SEPTEMBER RESTORED A LARGE DEGREE OF PRESS FREEDOM. WHILE THE TELEVISION/RADIO CODE REMAINS RESTRICTIVE, JOURNALISTIC FREEDOM IS REMARKABLE FOR A COUNTRY WHERE POLITICAL TENSION AND ANTI-GOVERNMENT ACTIVITY ARE SO WIDESPREAD.

IN SUM, THE FLOW OF INFORMATION AND THE WORKING PRESS IN LATIN AMERICA HAVE CLEARLY BENEFITED FROM THE HEIGHTENED CONCERN FOR HUMAN RIGHTS SO EVIDENT IN INTER-AMERICAN RELATIONS.

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